

Congressional PANEL

The following series of questions and responses from a guest panel of five members of congress address a wide range of civil-military issues. The panel is composed of the following legislators: Senator Rick Santorum, Senator Carl Levin, Senator Daniel K. Inouye, Representative Floyd D. Spence and Representative John P. Murtha.

Over the years, the level of military experience among members of Congress and staff has steadily declined. How do you assess this evolution and its impact on Congress's ability to provide leadership and oversight in national security affairs?

Representative John P. Murtha, Democrat-Pennsylvania and ranking member on the House Appropriations Subcommittee for Defense. It is simply a fact of life that the level of military experience among members of Congress is declining, just as it is in the general population, and is a byproduct of going to the All-Volunteer Force (AVF). This has an effect both in terms of the depth of understanding of military issues in Congress and the general populace's support of military programs. Please do not get me wrong—members of Congress

do care about our military. But if they have not experienced military service—both the good and the bad—it is simply more difficult for them to sort out the truth from the fiction.

This is not a fatal flaw in and of itself. Just as I may have to vote on complex medical legislation although I am not a doctor, or banking regulation when I am not a banker, it is incumbent on me to go the extra mile to educate myself and to talk to the experts. That is what seems to be lacking today in the foreign and military policy arenas. However, I do think members of Congress are not getting out enough to properly educate themselves about the complicated policy issues we face in the Middle East, Balkans and Pacific Rim. There is simply no substitute for getting out to the field to understand the complexities of a situation and to see what our troops are actually faced with to accomplish the mission. Somalia is a good example. I went over there and came back to tell President George Bush that we were making a big mistake. It was not a popular stand to take, but after talking to the experts on the ground, it was evident we were in over our heads with a very ambiguous mission. If more key members had gone over there, we may

***F**or the past 25 years, we have seen a steady decline in both the House and Senate of members who have served in our military services. Currently, 41 percent of the US Senate and 31 percent of the US House of Representatives have served in our military. Few have served in combat. Statistics for the staffers who have served in our military are not available, but I would assume it is as low as, or lower than, the percentages for members of Congress. While I can understand the evolution that has occurred, I do not feel it is necessarily good for our military and our nation. It is essential that there be sufficient members who have served to articulate the hardships and sacrifices associated with military life on service personnel and their families. There are no substitutes for hands-on experience.—Senator Inouye*

have had a different outcome. Instead, I think members of Congress and the administration were more influenced by 30-second television reports on the evening news than anything else.

Senator Daniel K. Inouye, Democrat-Hawaii and ranking member on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for Defense. For the past 25 years, we have seen a steady decline in both the House and Senate of members who have served in our military services. Currently, 41 percent of the US Senate and 31 percent of the US House of Representatives have served in our military. Few have served in combat. Statistics for the staffers who have served in our military are not available, but I would assume it is as low as, or lower than, the percentages for members of Congress. While I can understand the evolution that has occurred, I do not feel it is necessarily good for our military and our nation. It is essential that there be sufficient members who have served to articulate the hardships and sacrifices associated with military life on service personnel and their families. There are no substitutes for hands-on experience in this area. We need to have a sufficient number of members of Congress with service experience—on the appropriate committees—to ensure our national defense and those who serve are properly represented in the US Congress.

Representative Floyd D. Spence, Republican-South Carolina and chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. There is no question that congressional leaders with military experience are a valuable commodity in Congress. Not only does military experience provide members with a context for addressing issues of importance to the services; it also enhances Congress's credibility when considering defense issues. However, mem-



Senator Daniel K. Inouye

bers and staffers who have not served in the military also play a vital role in our deliberations. It has been my experience that such members and staff approach defense issues critically and thoughtfully and do so in a manner that compels the defense establishment to think through and more clearly articulate national security issues.

Senator Carl Levin, Democrat-Michigan and ranking member on the Senate Armed Services Committee. There is still a substantial base of military experience among members of Congress and congressional staff, particularly among members and staff of the two Armed Services Committees. We also draw extensively on the experience and views of those currently serving in the military in reaching conclusions in the national interest. Because of Congress's role in providing civilian oversight for the military, a wide diversity of experience among members and staff is probably helpful. For example, I believe that my own 20 years of service on the Senate Armed Services Committee have given me a great deal of insight into the way the military operates and what it needs to face the challenges of the 21st century.

Senator Rick Santorum, Republican-Pennsylvania and chairman of the AirLand Forces Subcommittee. As defense planners look out to an uncertain and troubling future, it is clear that significant challenges will require our armed services to think and act differently than in the past. The age-old questions of "Who is our enemy and how can we best prepare to defeat them" will be increasingly more difficult to answer. Every year, Congress is faced with the task of understanding both current and future warfighting requirements and then deciding how to best allocate increasingly scarce resources to ensure our

The Army certainly has a compelling story to tell about the importance of land power in the national military strategy, particularly with regard to constructive engagement and the increased number of Army deployments around the world. In the last several years, the Army's ability to articulate its vision in Congress has been hampered by the failure of the Total Army to speak with one voice. Some of the disagreements between the Active Army and the Reserve Components on doctrine, force structure and resourcing have been played out in the halls of Congress.—Senator Levin

forces will be able to operate effectively and defeat any future adversary across a wide spectrum of conflict. Members of Congress are committed to the goal of ensuring our national security and the United States' status as the preeminent military power. They understand the need to achieve future battlefield superiority through increased emphasis on advanced technology programs and, in the end, understand the importance of funding a more robust, progressive procurement program that will provide required capabilities for the future.

Who are the members of Congress today, and what types of experience do they bring to the defense budget process that supports the national military strategy? There are those who express concern about a declining pool of members who have served in the military and the impact that a limited experience base might have on defense funding. If you look at the 106th Congress, you will find Senator Robert Kerrey, a Medal of Honor recipient; Senator Strom Thurmond, who flew into Normandy in a glider during World War II; members who were former prisoners of war; and others who have served in uniform or in the Department of Defense (DOD) in a wide variety of capacities.

Generally, it is true that there continues to be a declining base of members who have served in uniform. However, this trend may offer opportunity as future national military strategy requirements challenge us in ways we may not anticipate. The declining base of members who have served in uniform may be an advantage to those who believe that DOD needs to be open to new ideas and new ways of meeting future defense challenges. In any case, members of Congress respect those who serve in our Armed Forces and listen to what the uniformed leadership has to say in deciding how to best meet future defense policy and funding requirements.



Senator Carl Levin

How would you assess the Total Army's ability to articulate for Congress the role and importance of land power in the National Military Strategy, the Army's vision for the future and its strategy of transformation through "Force XXI" toward the "Army After Next" (AAN)?

Representative Murtha. To be blunt, I think the Army is behind the Air Force and Navy in terms of selling its next-generation, 21st-century program. Part of this is natural. Sleek, stealthy aircraft and ships with a dose of lasers and satellites are always going to capture more public attention and public imagination than digitization, better radio batteries and tank upgrades. And don't be fooled, Congress is keenly aware of public perceptions and sentiments—that is why we are here. Having said that, the experts on Capitol Hill who closely follow military affairs know that the ordinary foot soldier and our ground forces in general are still going to be the centerpiece of 21st-century national security policy. Look at our current situation as the Cold War strategy is being replaced by manpower-intensive peacekeeping missions in the Balkans, Middle East and Korea. We cannot keep the peace in Bosnia with air power alone. South Korea would have been overrun long ago without US ground forces on the scene. If anything, we will see this role grow in the future as it is acknowledged that American leadership is indispensable around the world. It is essential to support continued improvements for the Army and the Marine Corps, and I think we will.

In terms of the "vision thing" as former President George Bush used to say, there is always some built-in skepticism among us appropriators. Some of this is natural; we look at things in the shorter term. The AAN does not mean a whole lot to our committee. Getting a Theater High-Altitude

There is a general perception among those familiar with defense issues that the Army is consistently honest, polite and nonaggressive. In fact, a common area of criticism for the Army has been an apparent unwillingness of Army leaders to actively court members' support or work with the Congress to gain support for critical initiatives. There has always been a core constituency in the Army that believes the merit and purity of the Army requirements for modernization will carry the day on Capitol Hill and no further action is required or desirable. Unfortunately, the Army is the only service that holds this view, and the results speak to the validity of this position.—Senator Santorum

Area Defense System to work properly does. Getting a better and lighter radio battery does. Getting new trucks that do not break down does. We see the concept, but there is always that suspicion that a so-called *revolution in military affairs* and *combat enablers* are fancy words to justify sizing the force to the available dollars. So I would say there is a healthy skepticism about these grand schemes, but certainly not out-and-out opposition.

Senator Santorum. To prepare for operations in an information-rich future environment, the Army has adopted a course of action that will result in a digitized force, which will rapidly capture tactical information and disseminate it to the soldiers on the battlefield. By “knowing where I am, where my friends are and where the enemy is,” the Army will be able to improve sensor-to-shooter reaction time and enable commanders to better understand a complex battlefield. Knowledge is power, and Army digitization efforts will enhance the ability of commanders to act more effectively. While the benefits of digitization are relatively obvious, many outside the Army do not fully understand what digitization will do for the Army or the programmatic aspects of this initiative. As a result, there is a limited constituency of support for emerging Army digitization requirements. While the Army has tried to communicate the digitization initiative's importance, it is a complex subject that is as difficult to understand as the need for next-generation fighter aircraft or a new aircraft carrier.

Senator Inouye. The Army probably has the toughest challenge among the services in articulating its program for future capabilities and force structure. The uncertainty and complexity of future threats make it very difficult to draw a direct relationship between what we need to be ready for tomorrow and how we are going to get ready for it



Senator Rick Santorum

today. The complexity and size of the Army and, as discussed earlier, the lack of military experience on Capitol Hill, contribute to this challenge. The Army has explained and demonstrated reasonably well its Force XXI process for managing change, which we in Congress must monitor and evaluate. We are very interested in how the Army proposes to change the affordability of fielding technologies for digitization and the integration and modernization of the Army National Guard and Army Reserve. Our

interest is not necessarily because the Army has not effectively communicated its vision. Rather, we recognize the vision is ambitious, current operations are demanding and modernization resources are not always available when needed or as planned. We understand the Army's path to the future, and we are paying close attention to the process and results of change and, most important, remain committed to the Army's readiness for the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Representative Spence. The Army has done a good job of establishing the importance of land power—not only today but in the future. I am particularly excited by the Force XXI experiments, which I view as a practical approach to making sense of the “fog of war.” Likewise, the AAN project is an important effort to look further into the future with an eye on enduring national security interests. However, the Army must do a better job of expressing its ideas as part of the broader public debate over US strategy and defense requirements. Given the gravity of this debate, Army leaders need to be more active in explaining to all Americans the importance of land power in an increasingly dangerous world.

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increased number of Army deployments around the world. In the last several years, the Army's ability to articulate its vision in Congress has been hampered by the failure of the Total Army to speak with one voice. Some of the disagreements between the Active Army and the Reserve Components on doctrine, force structure and resourcing have been played out in the halls of Congress. Secretary Louis Caldera, General Dennis J. Reimer, Major General Roger C. Schultz and Major General Thomas J. Plewes are working hard to address these disagreements, and I am optimistic they will succeed.

How would you assess the current status of Army-Congress relations? Understanding that the Army has an important obligation to support congressional participation in the national security policy process, what does the Army do well or need to improve to better meet this obligation?

Representative Spence. Developing and maintaining a good relationship with the military services' leaders is vital to conducting effective congressional oversight of DOD. Likewise, a sound working relationship is also important to you—the military services—to ensure that you articulate your priorities and your perspectives. In my experience, there are two means of building such a relationship—first, through service chiefs and senior military leaders who make direct contact with members; and second, through maintenance of high-quality liaison offices.

I think the importance of personal contact and regular communication between military and congressional leaders is obvious and needs little explanation. However, few recognize the importance of service liaison offices to this relationship, even though they shoulder the day-to-day burden of developing and maintaining effective relations with members of Congress



Representative Floyd D. Spence

and staff. My experience has been that the most effective liaison offices are those which facilitate routine communications between Congress and military leaders. As such, good relationships between Congress and the services can only exist when service chiefs recognize the importance of quality liaison work and provide unambiguous guidance that liaison offices are an extension of their own. In such an environment, the services that put their “best and brightest” in liaison offices tend to develop the best congressional-service relationships. In short, I encourage all service chiefs to build personal relationships with members of Congress, elevate the prestige of their liaison offices and ensure that they maintain direct two-way communication with their liaison offices.

Senator Santorum. There is a general perception among those familiar with defense issues that the Army is consistently honest, polite and nonaggressive. In fact, a common area of criticism for the Army has been an apparent unwillingness of Army leaders to actively court members' support or work with the Congress to gain support for critical initiatives. There has always been a core constituency in the Army that believes the merit and purity of the Army requirements for modernization will carry the day on Capitol Hill and no further action is required or desirable. Unfortunately, the Army is the only service that holds this view, and the results speak to the validity of this position. Of the roughly \$112 billion that the president has suggested will be added to the future years defense program, the Army will receive only about 18 percent of the modernization dollars available. Success with the Congress often depends on relationships and interaction between members and military leaders. While the characteristics attributed to the Army are positive

To be blunt, I think the Army is behind the Air Force and Navy in terms of selling its next-generation, 21st-century program. Part of this is natural. Sleek, stealthy aircraft and ships with a dose of lasers and satellites are always going to capture more public attention and public imagination than digitization, better radio batteries and tank upgrades. And don't be fooled, Congress is keenly aware of public perceptions and sentiments—that is why we are here.—Representative Murtha

on the surface, there may be some validity to the argument that the relatively limited interaction between Army leaders and members of Congress has not served the Army well in its quest for additional modernization resources.

Representative Murtha. I think the current state of Army-Congress affairs is pretty good. My staff always complains a little about the constant turnover at the Pentagon in both the political ranks and in the ranks of military leadership. Admittedly, this can be frustrating at times. We have relationships and understandings built up that suddenly change overnight with a new face coming on the scene. We have had some turbulence of late with the Army, but the Army is listening, and relationships are improving as people begin to know one another better.

Senator Levin. I have always found the Army to be very responsive to congressional requests for information. There is no substitute for first-hand observation. The Army should encourage members of Congress and their staffs to visit Army installations to see firsthand the programs and chal-



Representative John P. Murtha

lenges facing the young men and women of today's Army.

Senator Inouye. The Department of the Army has historically been exemplary in its congressional relations. The personnel assigned to the Senate Army Liaison Office have been particularly knowledgeable and helpful. Additionally, my office is constantly being provided with timely and informative position papers in regard to weapon systems, contracts and reductions in force, just to name of few. Within recent years there has been a substantial

reduction in the number of Army personnel seeking congressional assistance. This is a commendable reflection on the handling of constituent personnel issues including recruitment, compassionate reassignments, hardship separations and medical problems. In this environment of rapid communication, expectations for a fast reply or resolution of a problem are high but not unreasonable. I consider myself part of the solution to service member problems, and I would fully expect a problem to be corrected prior to a soldier's separation from the service. On balance, our working relationship is excellent. **MR**

About the Contributors:

Senator Rick Santorum represents the state of Pennsylvania in the US Congress. He currently chairs the AirLand Forces Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC). He holds a B.A. from Pennsylvania State University, an M.B.A. from the University of Pittsburgh and a J.D. from Dickinson School of Law.

Senator Carl Levin represents the state of Michigan in the US Congress. He currently is the ranking Democratic member of the SASC. He holds a B.A. from Swarthmore College and an LL.B. from Harvard University.

Senator Daniel K. Inouye represents the state of Hawaii in the US Congress. He is currently the ranking Democratic member on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for Defense. A hero with a conspicuous record during World War II, Senator Inouye lost an arm

while serving with the all Japanese-American 442d Regiment. He holds an A.B. from the University of Hawaii and a J.D. from George Washington University.

Representative Floyd D. Spence represents the 2nd district in South Carolina. He currently is the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. A Korean War era Navy veteran, he has nearly three decades of national security experience in Congress. He holds an A.B. and J.D. from the University of South Carolina.

Representative John P. Murtha represents the 12th district in Pennsylvania. He currently is the ranking Democratic member on the House Appropriations Subcommittee for Defense. A former Marine with a distinguished combat record, he has nearly three decades of national security experience in Congress. He holds a B.A. from the University of Pittsburgh.